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# **The Reflection of Sub continental Primitive Archetype Mother in the Films of Ritwik Ghatak**

**Zuairijah Mou**

Ritwik Ghatak is one of the significant Indian filmmakers in the Indian subcontinent. The touch of the culture of Bengal is clearly evident in the films of Ritwik Ghatak. Before analyzing the role of the primitive mother archetype in the scenes or in the development of the characters in his films, it is necessary to understand the origin of the primitive mother archetype.

The primitive mother archetype or maternal form is the statements, figure, myth, pattern, form, use etc. which has been existing in any culture for a long time. For example, the form of 'Mother' in Bengal is worshiped as *Jagajjanani* or Mother Earth. Her name is '*Jaggadatri*' because she is holding or taking care of the whole world. Her name is 'Kali' when she appears to defeat evil and to establish the power of good in the times of suppression of the wicked and in the times of observance of the rituals. When it comes to fulfill the wish of the devotees by destroying all their misery, she is called then by the name of *Durgatinashini Durga*. Her names and forms are endless. In various ways, these images appeared in different forms or patterns amidst of us. The origin of the mother was expressed by using different statements like '*Basanti*', '*Durga*', '*Jaggadatri*', '*Kali*', '*Durgitanisini Durga*' at Bengal in this sub-continent.

Now let's come to the point of the effect or the use of Mother Archetype in the characterization in the Ritwik Ghatak's films. Let's see how the matter is clear in some of his own words. In an interview regarding 'Megha Dhaka Tara' taken by Chinmoy Mutsuddi in which Ritwik Ghatak said, "'Nita' is the most beloved among my characters till date, I have imagined her as a symbol of the hundred years old Bengali *Gauri Dan*. Her birthday is celebrated in Jagaddhtari Puja, and she reunites with the Mahakal / time and space in the death. "

This means, the great influence of mother archetype in the characterization of the character of 'Nita'. It is possible to make a great deal of analysis on this effect by analyzing scenes, dialogues or stories.

Besides that, Dr. Gurudas Bhattacharya writes in the book 'Ritwikamangal' - "the girl Seeta in "Subarnarekha" screams out of fear when a mask-man comes in front of her suddenly. According to the director, "The whole civilization is facing this horrifying darkness today - the crisis, life faces death, its image, its scream". The director of frustration believes in restoration. In his opinion the way of this is: for love (*Neeta*) for art (*Anusua*) or in the form of life (*Seeta*). That day, Kali will come in the form of *Uma*, golden light will be spread removing the darkness away. "

For the readers kind attention, it clearly shows from the statement of the RitwikGhatak, that every female character holds the shadow of the original maternal form of Bengal.

In another interview in the same book 'Ritwikmangal', the film director and organizer Muhammad Khasru told the directorRitwikGhatak - 'Some of the characters are expressed in the Archetypal Symbol in your films. You are particularly influenced by the psychoanalyst Yung's collective unconsciousness. So the characters of your films like 'Meghedhakataara'sNeeta', Gauri, "'komol Gandhar's Shakuntala', Anusua, "Subarnarekha's Seeta'smother, Seeta and the maid of king in Titas are made in the form of *Vagabati*.

**Now –**

- To understand how the social and political status of woman is developed under the influence of the mother archetype in Ritwik's film.
- To find out how the form, pattern and treatment of the mother archetype develop a woman-character
- &
- To explore how the symbolic significance of the mother archetype works as sub-text of the film.

**Subject-related assessment of the related information is there -**

Let's come to the topic of using the mother archetype to illustrate a character in Ritwik Ghatak's film. Let's see how Ritwik cleared this matter in some of his statements. With an interview about his film 'Meghe Dhaka Tara' with Chinmoy Mutsuddi, he said, " 'Neeta' is the most favourite to me among all the characters I have created till today. I imagined her as the symbol of hundreds year old Bengali tradition of Gouridan. She was born on the occasion of Jagaddatri Puja, and she met the hill, which signifies the great time, through death." (1)

So it is clear how much influence the mother archetype has in the depiction of the character of 'Neeta'. A great analysis of this influence can be composed through the analysis of the scenes, dialogues or story which is detailed in later chapters.

Besides, Dr. Gurudas Bhattachariya, in his book 'Ritwik Mangal', wrote- "In Subarnarekha, adolescent Sita screams out of fear while she suddenly faces an impersonator disguised as Kali. The director's view: "The whole civilization is facing this dreadful kali- a crisis, to say the life facing the death. It's the image of that, the scream of that." The director of decadence believes in restoration too. To him that path lies in: love (Neeta), art (Anusuya) or establishing life (Sita). In that day, the Kali will become the Uma, the darkness will be removed and there will be the golden light."

See, it's clear from the speeches of Ritwik Ghatak that depending on the circumstances and atmosphere the particular female characters demonstrate the shadow of the bengali mother archetype. In another interview from the book 'Ritwik Mangal', Muhammad Khasru, a director and organizer from Bangladesh, said to Ritwik – "Some characters of the most of your films are revealed as Archetypal Symbol. You are specially influenced by psychologist Jung's collective unconsciousness. So some characters of your film i.e. Neeta and Gouri from 'Meghe Dhaka Tara', Anusuya and Shakuntala from 'Komal Gandhar', Sita's mother, Sita and 'Titas's' Rajarhi are made as the archaic idol of Bhagvati."

From description these information it is apparent that the use and influence of the continental mother archetype is outlined in different circumstances through different ways. A brief description of that is found in the primary information. Now, let's proceed to the detailed analysis.

### **Social and political status of women in Ritwik's film:**

Women are always worshipped in Ritwik's cinemas, because the women in his cinemas are not an ordinary mother, beloved lady or daughter, rather the whole motherland. His love for the women is always the tension to the pulse, an attempt to return to the roots.

At first, we can try to understand the cultural backdrop/linguistics of the mother figure. These images are often referred to as "Great Mother" Archetype, which recall the mother-goddess icon of Bengali culture. Worship of goddess or motherhood is an integral part of Bengal's popular or existing religion; nowadays anyone can say that it has become a secular and popular culture as well. The learned people have noted that how the gods became fertile in the Pre -Aryan era; which mainly celebrates the fertility of the world in agricultural society. Ideally, such archaeological sources were running in Pre-Aryan matriarchal society, which came to be destroyed or marginalized by non-Aryans. Though they mention the Goddesses as the initial sign of land of fertility, in line with this the use of these goddesses to remain low and popular in religious beliefs is sustained. On the other hand, these images have become important again in the days of colonial nationalism. Then this 'Great Mother' is used as a symbol of motherland, race, language etc.

The only female character of Ritwik's film 'Azantrik' portrays the same. Even today, women are considered only as the help in producing children and support to household chores. Ritwik hit exactly in that thinking of us. We also see Neeta in the same position in 'Meghe Dhaka Tara'. Meghe Dhaka Tara portrays how Neeta is destroyed slowly by a family. Neeta is the eldest daughter in the family, but keeping Neeta aside her younger sister is being married off with Neeta's beloved man. Neeta becomes numb, speechless. Neeta's parents want that too. If Neeta leaves, there will be no one to look after the family, without her the family is fragile. So the Neeta shouldn't have any dream, any expectation. Neeta the image of the common bengali woman figure that we or the men are habituated to see. Consciously or unconsciously we advise women, "keep quiet and endure". Ritwik

makes Neeta stand against this view, against the current of the traditional patriarchy. We can hear the sky piercing scream of Neeta; “Brother, I wanted nothing but to li...v...e...” Ritwik makes Neeta to stand up against the whole world. Then Neeta does not remain Neeta only, she becomes the name of a dreadful truth.

In this regard Ritwik said:

“When some images develop as an inevitable consequence and again become inconsequential in the process of turning into symbols, it is only then that the archetypal force is born.” [3]

“In my films I keep the characters in touch with this materialistic world, but gradually they assume some personality on the imaginative level.” [4]

Ritwik holds the concept of the mother archetype through representing women socially and politically. For this reason, when a political procession goes on in ‘Komol Gandhar’, the little child opens the barrier of maternal love and tries to hold *Anusuya* back. Just like, the deer calf is trying to hold *Shakuntala* back.

## **In the Style of Film Making**

### **Appearance of Form-Pattern-Treatment of the Original Mother archetype -**

√ Nita in “Meghe Dhaka Tara” or “Stars behind the Cloud” and Sita in “Subarnarekha” or “Golden Line” as Bharatmata, Durga, Uma and Gauri:



*Scene 1- Meghe Dhaka Tara (collected from internet)*

'Meghe Dhaka Tara' represents a Bengali low-middle class family which has come to this country as refugee due to the 1947 partition. Their struggle to survive is going on. Neeta, daughter of the family, keeps the wheel of the family to run with keeping her studying as well as earning with her tuition. Her elder brother Shankar is a musician and has a dream to become a great singer. Nita's old father is a school master. Mother takes care of the house chore. And younger brother Montu and the younger sister Geeta are self-centered. In the first part of the film, Nita waits eagerly for the success of a man, Sanat, a young meritorious person who is a scientist and would get married to Rita one day.

The story of the film moves on with many ups and down including Montu's accident, father's paralysis, Geeta's fall in love with Sanat and then the marriage of Geeta-Sanat and mother's selfish attitude to Neeta.

On the other hand, there is Seeta's attempt to move on in 'Subarnarekha'. Even after the disaster of her family, the desire to do something with self-confidence is thus seen as a safeguard until the end.

*Neeta* and *Seeta* are not only the protectors of their own families, but also considered as the archetype of Mother-India. Firstly, considering Ritwik Ghatak's interpretation of the character 'Neeta', it can be seen that the director has used various songs and background music which were borrowed from the rural Bengal's folk music to draw this character as 'Woman', 'Goddess', 'Bengal's Mother'.



Regarding the character of 'Neeta', Ritwik Kumar Ghatak himself said - "... Uma's Symbol is very clear here. Neeta is the most favorite character I have ever created so far; I have imagined her as a symbol of the hundred years old Bengali tradition of Gauridan. Her birthday is celebrated in the Jagadhattripuja, she reunites with the hill/mountain or the Mahakal (Time). When the first signal of goodbye comes with the first glimpse of tuberculosis, then they continue to sing with weeping the farewell of *Menka*." [5]

Nafisi Hamid, the Iranian cinema-critic and theorist, brings up the reference of the two films in detail that Ritwik is 'Accented' and 'Exiled' filmmaker. Exiled in a sense that probably who cannot forget the wound of leaving his homeland or who is a complete stranger in this new land.

Theorist Nafisi Hamid has described the "accented" filmmaker as-

"Situated but universal figures who work in the interstices of social formations and cinematic practices." [6]

The approach of "Accented Cinema" has been used in 'Meghe Dhaka Tara' and 'Subarnarekha' in open form, natural external world and closed interior as used in Mij-en-Sin.

Ira Bhaskar says in his article titled "Myth and Ritual: Ghatak's Meghe Dhaka Tara" about the influence of myth and original/primitive mother archetype in the character of Neeta,



“A prevalent story about the genesis of Durga is the concept of Havyagni (oblation to the sacrificial fire). In the ritual of the Havan (the act of consigning the mortal offering to the sacrificial flames) is symbolized the surrender of human desires and aspirations which are carried to the heavens with the smoke. It is believed that Durga was born out of this smoke as a transmutation of human desires, taking the form of Jagadhatari, the universal sustainer. One of the central images associated with Nita is the courtyard wherein are centered the ambitions of the rest of the family... These selfish ambitions pour into the courtyard, the symbolic yagnamandapa, from which manifests Nita in the role of the Provider and Creator.” [7]

The sound of the boiling rice is heard and the scene becomes visible in between Neeta's mother's expression which develops into a form of Jagadattri or Mother-earth.

Traditionally, kitchen is the heart of Bengali families! The location of kitchen is built in a closed, small and suffocating situation in the 'Meghe Dhaka Tara' which is very much intentional creation of the director. It symbolically stirs up the tone of hatred and sacrifices which stay together for women. For this reason, what drafts behind the selfishness of the character of 'Neeta's Mother' is the indomitable desire to keep the family together, and to maintain the comfort of the family. This desire identifies the motherland. Soil gives us the right to get and to build own shelter in it undoubtedly.

When Ritwik Ghatak walks through a cut shot or pen shot, the 'Mother' character crosses the level of clouds/uncertainty to 'Neeta', there is the sound of the boil of rice, which means the Mother Earth is observing Nita, not only as the daughter but also as the protector.

When he wants to show 'Neeta' as Uma or the Goddess, then the background music starts with the original folk music of Bengal,

*"Come on Uma to my lap ...*

*Wearing the jasmine necklet..."*

*Again in that same song -*

*“Go daughter, go to mother's house.*

*Making my house empty... ’’*

The archetype of Uma as Neeta is leaving the house forgetting her tuberculosis and herself as well to save the family through self-sacrifice, and her days are going towards the death to embrace. And a family has survived on sucking her life-force. In the same way, it shows the mother of eternal Bengal in the same way the mothers are doing forever.

Thus, Ritwik Ghatak shows the socio-economic background of middle-class and lower-middle-class Bengalis through the sub-continental mythology and melodrama.

✓ **The Original Mother Archtype in “Titas Ekti Nodir Nam” (Titas is a name of a River) -**



Mother/Hindu Goddess Bhagbati/Goddess of Fortune/Creation has appeared as the archaeological/sculptural epitome in the film titled 'Titas is the name of a river'. On the day of the ritual sacrificing of ghee, Ananta's aunt says to Ananta, 'If the mother dies, then the mother turns into an enemy from mother. Wherever she goes afterlife, she wants to bring her son to there.' But Ananta protests this talk. He says his mother is not like that. On that night, her mother appears to him in the disguise of Goddess Bhagbati/Goddess of Fortune/Creation. This is really a careful presentation of the creative thinking of the director to the original/primitive archetype mother!

✓ **The Original Mother Archetype in the character of Anusua in "Komolgandhar" -**

In 'KomolGandhar', Anusua is repeatedly depicted with Shakuntala. The moment of the leaving the country with her beloved has been merged parallel with the scene of Shukuntala's leaving her state with the king. When Anusua is in indecision whether she should leave her dream-reality-country or not, a little boy grasps her clothes/saree at that time. Viewers can recall the very familiar

story of when Shakuntala was about to leave her State, a cub of a deer pulls her saree back at that moment.

The deer-cub, which was fostered by Shakuntala since its birth, is the favorite of Shakuntala. As if then the little boy becomes the image of the hungry child of the-mother-India, and Anusua becomes the mother-India. Anusua is sometimes dedicated to creative wisdom in the greatness, efficiency, fault and spontaneity of her life. Anusua is a space or shelter. There is an appeal of the rivers and hills hidden in Anusua's nature. Whom Rabindranath has discovered after criticizing Bankimchandra's article named 'Shakuntala, Miranda and Desdimona', Ritwik related the same symbol. That is why he said - "Shakuntala becomes Bangladesh to me. That wonderful article by Rabi Tagore –in which he draws the impressive comparisons of Shakuntala and Miranda, influenced me. "[8]

In this way Anusua has become a piece of land, a symbol of original Mother Archetype.

### ✓ **The Original Mother Archetype in “Jukti Takko ar Goppo” -**

The last film of Ritwik Ghata is “Jukti Takko ar Goppo'. Many call it an autobiographical film of him. Ritwik himself played the leading role in this film. Utpal Dutta and others performed in the film. The plot revolves around the character of Neelkantha Bagchi.

When civil writer Satyajit Bose tells him about his thoughts about Bangladesh, Neelkantha Bagchi speaks in a voice with sarcastic tone, "Think, think, and practice thinking." This sarcasm is told to those hypocrite intellectuals. When Neelkantha asks an east-Pakistani refugee girl who has come to Bengal in India after partition, "Who are you mother, are you the spirit of my country, that Bangladesh which is yet to be born?" At that very moment, it is understood that Ritwik is giving priority Mother of Bengal with love reflected in the great dialogue! In this film, he is also the same man who calls very emotionally “mother” to the girl who dances Kathakali wearing mask in the dance mask! It is also the tales of archetype of motherhood.

Society is in a deep crisis till today. Even in Ritwik's time, there is an attempt to see the partition and post-partition refugee society in a profound analytical way of social, political and economic structure within his films. Among these, all is seen to be associated with folk culture and heritage.

Analyzing the entire discussion, it is seen that the identity of primitive archetype mother is existing in the film of Ritwik based on the social and political condition.

Also Neeta, Seeta, Ananta's aunt, Anusua all are the representative of subcontinent's primitive matrilineal myths and the myths surrounding their own pain, wound and joy. In order to visualize the original maternal form of art, the artistic way is shown in many different extents.

Not only the character portrayal, but also original maternal form is seen in all sectors of the selection of music, set and location and in art direction. Ritwik epitomizes of the people and the nature in women in the vast ocean of nature.

Mother India or Bengal-Mother, Goddess statues or in disguise of mask in traditional dance, the character of the myths or any maternal character of the novel reflect in every shot of the plot-scene-sound!

So the real spirit/essence of the subcontinent's original maternal form is hidden in the film of Ritwik!

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